

TOYNBEE AND THE CULTURE CYCLE

His "Study of History" Studied

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THE last four volumes of Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History* (VII, VIII, IX, X), despite their enormous mass of new detail, add nothing to the basic ideas already stated in the first six. But as the chief interest of Toynbee's work lies in these ideas and assumptions, it is worth dealing with them again as they are revealed in the later volumes, leaving aside a treatment of their particular content, which in any case would defy the limits of this essay.

According to his own account, Toynbee conceived his theory of history at about the same time that Oswald Spengler was formulating his own somewhat similar ideas. It would therefore be wrong to accuse Toynbee of an unacknowledged dependence on Spengler's work. However, since Spengler's *Decline of the West* appeared much earlier than the first volumes of *A Study of History*, one regrets that Toynbee has paid so little explicit attention to it; all the more so as his relation to Spengler constitutes the starting point for any serious assessment of his contribution.

HAVING in our May 1955 number called A. J. Toynbee to account for his *Study of History's* animadversions on Jewry and Zionism, FRANZ BORKENAU here renews his critique of the British historian's monumental work with a more general examination of its key ideas. Mr. Borkenau, a regular contributor, is perhaps better known to our readers as a political observer than as a philosopher of history, but his first love has always been history, and he has published many studies in that field in journals abroad. Born in Vienna, Mr. Borkenau went to England with the advent of Hitler. After 1945 he returned briefly to Germany as professor of history at the University of Marburg. He is the author of *The Spanish Cockpit*, *World Communism*, and *European Communism*.

Spengler's real originality did not consist in his ideas about historical rise and decline as such. Those had been a theme of European historical speculation since Machiavelli. Where Spengler went beyond such thinkers as Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Gibbon, and Burckhardt was in applying the concept of rise and decline to whole civilizations or cultures, rather than just to nations and countries. The notion of a frame of historical development larger than the political-linguistic unit formed by the nation-state had always been latent in Western Christian thought, and by the early 19th century the German historian Leopold von Ranke had made it explicit in his attempt to write a collective history of the "Romanic and Germanic" nations. Ranke, however, was blind as well as hostile to the larger processes of cultural change, and did not visualize Romanic-Germanic (i.e. Western) history in terms of rise and decline. Spengler's achievement was to combine the idea of a supra-national civilization or culture with that of a cyclical development in history. The theory of culture cycles that he created now dominates our historical thinking—at least our thinking about such grandiose historical phenomena as civilizations and cultures. We see evidence of this in the universal employment of the term "the West"; and "rise and decline" are words which we often employ to express our present anxiety about the future of our way of life. Here Toynbee has to be regarded as Spengler's epigone; his claim to have made his discoveries independently cannot take away from Spengler's achievement and precedence in opening our eyes to this whole new constellation of ideas.

Spengler next tried to extend his view of the culture as a historical unit from the West

to the other groups generally accepted as "higher civilizations." In doing this he found it necessary to establish a strict definition of the central experience peculiar to each culture. That is, he wanted to identify and isolate a unique heart and core whence the whole development of any civilization flowed. It was in this attempt, praiseworthy in itself, to define just what differentiated and separated higher civilizations from all the others that Spengler made his basic errors. Following a current of thought popular before 1914, but now half forgotten, he treated all the outward expressions of a civilization as "symbols." Symbols of what? Spengler's implied answer was: symbols of the inexpressible inner core, the "soul," of the particular civilization, which is supposed to be its highest contribution to the domain of values. But these are empty words, empty German words, serving only to conceal the total denial—implicit throughout Spengler—that a civilization is built for human survival and human needs—and a total denial that what happens to human beings in history matters; that the fruits of human experience can be accumulated over the long run and passed on from one civilization to another.

Nor was that "symbolism" improved by the Kantian element Spengler infused into it. Kant argues that space and time are *a priori* patterns which we impose on the chaotic raw material we receive from our sense impressions; these patterns, however, have no intrinsic relation to ultimate objective reality, the "*Ding an sich*." Spengler historicized this philosophical idea by maintaining that each and every civilization had its own unique conception of space, which was reflected in all its expressions and works. This notion in itself is hardly worth serious discussion—especially when we see how Spengler derived from it the entirely untenable theory that the mathematics developed in the various civilizations were basically dissimilar, that a mathematical truth for one culture was not one for another.

BUT where Spengler sinned through extravagance, Toynbee sins through trivi-

ality. If his dictum that "all civilizations are fundamentally contemporaneous" means anything, it means that there are no radical differences among them. What significance, then, does human variety itself possess? Toynbee's view—that differences don't matter—betrays an ultimate pessimism about the meaning of human development equal to Spengler's, if not as conscious or consistent.

Moreover, the "philosophical" contemporaneity he claims for all civilizations opens the door to many forced and far-fetched comparisons and the perception of similarities where none exists. A major instance of this is his assertion that the decline of every civilization is marked by the period of a "universal state"; yet a universal state marks the beginning, not the end, of Ancient Egypt's history. Another example is his claim that all higher civilizations end with the establishment of "universal churches"; yet there have been only four or five such churches, and Toynbee himself lists twenty-one higher civilizations. Conversely, he holds that a "universal church" is always coterminous with a single civilization. This point may appear rather technical, but it is responsible, as I will try to show later, for Toynbee's faulty analysis of his most important and—for him—most specialized subject, the history of the Near and Middle East.

In his later volumes Toynbee does try to make amends for his original contention that all civilizations are philosophically contemporaneous by distinguishing three different "generations" of cultures: the "primary," river valley civilizations, then the pre-Christian and pre-Buddhist ones, and finally the Christian and Buddhist civilizations with their offshoots. But since he continues to cling somehow to "philosophical contemporaneity," and to insist on strained and artificial analogies between cultures moving on altogether different levels, this modification in terms of "generations" creates confusion rather than clarity, and remains unreconciled with the rest of his position. In any case, Toynbee's unrestrained penchant for finding parallels wherever he looks in history frustrates any serious attempt on his

part to discuss the specific characteristics of the various civilizations. Spengler at least correctly posed a great problem—what distinguishes one culture from another?—even if he failed to solve it, but Toynbee loses sight of the problem entirely, and thus falls short of his predecessor.

At another and more important point, it is Spengler who comes off worse, however. His belief in a particular spatial "*Ursymbol*" (primordial symbol) for every civilization allows him to postulate the absolute uniqueness of all cultures. For him, civilizations are—to use Leibniz's term—"windowless monads," unable to understand or communicate with or profoundly influence one another. Each comes out of nowhere and, though leaving behind material ruins, bequeaths no genuine spiritual remains to humanity. Here Spengler (though he was himself a brave and outspoken anti-Nazi) reflects most clearly the destructive mood, the cultural nihilism, of pre- and proto-Nazi Germany. Toynbee is obviously right in opposing, to this cruel nonsense about civilizations being hermetically sealed off from one another, his notion of cultural "affiliation."

Historians have long been aware that civilizations, whether contemporaneous or separated in time, exert influence upon one another. It is also normal for younger civilizations to spring from older ones; the larger part of Toynbee's last four volumes is devoted to the discussion of such cases of culture contact and "affiliation." But though undoubtedly superior to Spengler in this aspect of his thinking, Toynbee, for all his learned parallels, falls considerably below the standards of historical research obtaining today. No serious historian would question the fact that many extraneous influences go into the making of a young civilization, but Toynbee simplifies the matter unduly by maintaining that each younger civilization is affiliated to some older one in the relation of child to parent. Must such children be limited to only one parent?

The most relevant case in point is Western civilization. According to Toynbee, it is affiliated in its origins with "Hellenic" civil-

ization, that is, the civilization of classical, Greco-Roman antiquity. So far so good—but what about Christianity, which is surely a force largely unexplained by Hellenic culture? Toynbee's answer is that Christianity is the universal church that developed out of Hellenism in decline. But where, then, do Jewry and Judaism come in? Toynbee assumes they played no part at all in the emergence of Christianity.

I am forced to rehearse the obvious: Christianity was a product, originally, of the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, of what Toynbee calls the "Syriac" civilization, but in its mature form it represents a merging of the "Hellenic" and the "Syriac" spirits. Hence Eastern Christianity was "affiliated" to two civilizations, not just one. Western civilization is likewise "affiliated" to two civilizations, the Hellenic and the Syriac—and even in this reckoning Northern barbarian influences on the West are left out, as are Transjordanian (neither Hellenic nor Syriac) influences on Christianity. A generalization that, like Toynbee's, does not provide for the possibility of a nascent civilization's having multiple affiliations is clearly unsuited to serve as the starting point for a philosophy of history and of civilizations.

SPENGLER, whose nihilistic mood was typical of the old Imperial Germany (Toynbee is quite wrong in seeing the *Decline of the West*, which was published at the height of the German victories in the spring of 1918, as reflecting Wilhelmian Germany's defeat in World War I), was completely amoral—as rigidly so as Marx, with the sole difference that for Marx morality reflected class, whereas for Spengler it reflected the "*Ursymbol*." Toynbee, by contrast, abounds in moral sentiment. But this is no reason for giving him a plus mark. In my recent review of Toynbee's attitude towards modern Jewry (COMMENTARY, May 1955), I gave some examples of how he applied his moral principles in discussing history and politics—thus, he found the Israelis' treatment of the Arabs of Palestine morally equivalent to the Nazi treatment of the Jews of Europe. It

would be altogether mistaken to think that this kind of moralizing is restricted to his section on the modern Jews and is attributable solely to the indubitable hostility he feels toward them. Quotations to illustrate his "moral" attitude can be gleaned in plenty from any part of his work.

The effect of a moralizing approach to history can best be seen in Toynbee's treatment of the problem of "decline." Decline, it turns out, sets in whenever a civilization is unable to cope with the "challenges" that face it. In substance, however, this is the same thing as saying that men die when their bodies prove unable to fulfill their organic functions. The real questions as regards both men and civilizations are: *which* functions break down, and *why* do they at one moment rather than another? Toynbee offers no explicit or rational answer to these rather elementary questions. Throughout his work, he seems to explain every case of decline by the wickedness of the particular civilization at the stage when decline ensues, by some "sin" that it has committed. But in view of the terrible atrocities and crimes that have characterized the early, "rising" stages of every high civilization, our own Western one not excepted (see the early medieval *Penitentials*, which make one blush for the gross and wicked conduct they imply on the part of the ordinary man), how can it be said that periods of decline are intrinsically more "sinful" than others?

THE decline of a civilization may indeed have something to do with sinfulness, but if so, it is with special *types* of "sin." The problem is why certain types of sin are connected with decline; put thus, the question might provide the starting point for a serious inquiry. Every time Toynbee comes across such an opportunity, however, he escapes into the doctrine of free will, which in this case is a veritable *asylum ignorantiae*. He contents himself with saying in effect that men sin because they sin, just as civilizations break down because they break down. This will do for a sermon, but not for a philosophy of history.

Toynbee's underlying assumption that in every situation there is but one good choice, which man has only to see and make, will cause modern economists (who stress the subjectivity of all economic choice) as well as modern theologians of all faiths (who stress the ambiguity and paradoxicality of all human action) to shudder. Of course, Toynbee may retort that both the economics and the theology of our day are wrong, but in that case let him *show* that they are wrong and really defend his own views.

I happen to think that the apparent "skepticism" and "subjectivism" of modern thought about man and his behavior contain new and important elements of truth. It turns out that the choice facing a human being who exercises free will is never between *one* good and *one* evil. In the first place, anything a man does affects not only his own moral character, but has consequences for many different sides of life: the family, the community, economics, politics, aesthetics, religion, etc., etc., all at one and the same time. In the second place, the real difficulty of making a choice stems from the fact that every good involves its own evil, so that a choice is generally among different goods each of which entails some evil.

Towards the end of his work Toynbee addresses himself to the two great modern problems of war and unemployment. He abounds in good advice—e.g., unless we avoid war we shall all perish—but nothing more pertinent or concrete than that. What, again, he does not seem to realize is that the solution of major problems, now as in the past, requires us to make compromises; that we cannot choose between absolute good and absolute evil; that any effective steps we can possibly take against either war or unemployment must at best strike the perfectionist as half-measures. There is no help for it. A predominantly moralizing approach like Toynbee's to the difficulties of human existence means only to evade and dissemble the humiliating experience of one's ordinary human inadequacy—and to do this by riding the high horse of moral superiority to, and contempt for, one's fellow human beings.

THE inescapable subjectivity, the ineluctable ambiguity of all human choice and action have a direct relevance to the problem of the rise and decline of civilizations—but a relevance that Toynbee's sermonizing obscures. A civilization is essentially a bundle of closely correlated beliefs and rules of conduct on the basis of which various communities act and interact. Now these beliefs and rules at bottom constitute social choices, and hence always lead to the adoption of one style of life to the exclusion of others. They may imply the rejection of whole areas of human possibility that in themselves are as justified or even more attractive than those actually adopted. But debate about this must be halted at some point or other in order to make the accepted rules valid and binding. To invest them with such validity, they are legitimized on a basis supposedly, but never really, unchallengeable.

The acceptance of conventions on the ground of a legitimization that is treated as unchallengeable is called traditionalism. All civilizations are traditional in some sort in their early stages: questionable rules of conduct are handed down unquestioningly from one generation to another. A civilization *emerges* precisely as such traditions are established; it *rises* as they are elaborated and as society is permeated by them. The traditions themselves arise under the pressure of disorder and disarray, for the emergence of most higher civilizations is presaged by the collapse of traditions left over from anterior high cultures and from the primitive tribal units in contact with them. Almost every civilization is born out of a "dark age" of chaos in which no rules of behavior are accepted as unquestionably valid.

The choosing of tradition rather than non-tradition, of cut-and-dried rules rather than chaos, carries its own evil with it. All rules are ambiguous, all rules are inadequate, all rules exclude essential and valuable parts of human experience. Though, formally, tradition is rooted in some principle of legitimacy, in actuality it derives from the need to avoid chaos. That need decreases, however, in proportion to the success with which

civilization fulfills its primary purpose of stabilizing a social order; and with the decrease of this need, greater and greater scope in questioning the social order is permitted. The very increase of social adjustment, by making the social processes and the "tissues" of society more complex, undermines that simplicity of basic conventions which alone gives social processes and tissues their firmness. A stage is reached at which the elements of disintegration get the upper hand, and a gradual loosening of tradition and of established rules sets in.

These forces of disintegration, far from being in the service of unbridled drives and urges, operate in obedience to a fuller truth and for the sake of a more exact social adjustment. They are indeed the very forces that, after a certain point, keep society and civilization moving. Without them there would be no human development, no history at all, but only changeless social stability and/or that passive surrender to new and hostile forces which we see in the case of some primitive, ossified societies upon whom more dynamic cultures impinge. Only at a very late stage in the development of a civilization, when tradition has been deeply and irreversibly undermined, do the drives formerly suppressed by rules of conduct break out into the open again; and it is in this phase that "moral" decline becomes a major factor in cultural change.

I think we can see now how the basic ambiguities of human existence, stressed in closely related terms by the social sciences on the one hand and by theology on the other, open a direct avenue to an understanding of the culture cycle. What appear in social science and theology as the innate limitations and ambiguities of the human condition, figure in history as the repetitive alternation of opposed attitudes. Toynbee himself has occasionally pointed out the occurrence of such an alternation—as, for instance, between an immanent and a transcendent God. Any number of similar alternations could be adduced. (It might even be argued—there isn't the space to go into this here—that on some fundamental ques-

tions, like the belief in survival after death, cultures seem to take views antithetical to those of the civilizations with which they are "affiliated," and under whose tutelage they are supposed to be.) The culture cycle as a whole might be described as an alternation between rigid traditionalism and tendencies to disruption and chaos. And history knows of no resting point in this up-and-down.

Yet not all processes in history are repetitive, and attitudes that have been discarded tend to return, not unchanged, but on a "higher level"—enriched and deepened by new elements acquired during their period of discard.

Toynbee is right in calling our present age one of moral disintegration, but he never identifies the roots or specifies the future implications of our crisis. He does not seem to realize that disintegration is just as creative, if less pleasant, a process as integration, and that new civilizations can never arise without the disintegration of old ones—in other words, he fails to treat the matter historically. And he also fails to understand that the framework of a stable civilization cannot accommodate *all* human ends, and that some of the most important of human objectives cannot be attained without an intervening period of deep crisis. It is precisely to accommodate these realities that a theory of cultural affiliation has to be framed, and precisely in this respect that the culture cycle has universal meaning. But here as elsewhere Toynbee fails to show a firm grasp of his own theories. Cultural affiliation or no, he regards the disintegration of culture or civilization, wherever he finds it, as an entirely negative process, and here he agrees wholly with Spengler.

This comes out most conspicuously in Toynbee's angry rejection of modern technology. I myself heard him say, at an Anglo-American historical conference in 1935, that the ancient Greeks had already achieved all that could profitably be done in the line of material civilization, and that our own modern technology was one big mistake from first to last. His argument was, of course, nothing but a play upon the am-

biguous sense of the word "material," which means two entirely different things when applied to ancient Hellas and to modern Western civilization.

All civilizations have striven for greater knowledge about nature and man. But the West alone has to its credit truly gigantic achievements in the department of rational, useful knowledge. These achievements, however, have been paid for by an unprecedented cultural crisis that may threaten the very existence of mankind. The West's accomplishments in scientific knowledge came almost entirely in the later stages of its historical development, when skepticism, rationalism, and anti-traditionalism abounded, and when there was a decline in positive religion and inherited moral standards. Does it follow, then, that the first, tradition-bound phase of our own or any other civilization is to be judged as better than our intensely modern and advanced one? This is what Toynbee seems to imply, but the implication has only to be stated to be rejected.

HIGHER civilizations, I noted a short while back, almost always arise out of barbaric ages whose chaotic disintegration and paranoiac savagery make the reshaping and re-establishment of tradition an overwhelming necessity. According to Toynbee, barbaric or "heroic" ages are good for nothing except the production of epic poetry. Nevertheless, where there is a relatively weak infusion of barbaric influence into a newborn civilization, the result is usually insufficient cultural vitality. Obviously, close contact with barbaric peoples can prove invaluable to a civilization in its first stages.

Eastern Christianity offers the classic example of a civilization that suffered because insulated too soon from contact with non-civilized peoples. Nothing could have been a more potent agent of rejuvenation for a moribund civilization than the newly fledged Christianity of the Middle East. Yet Byzantium, the heir of Rome, was incapable of exploiting this historical chance to the full. Once barbarian influences from beyond the Jordan and other border areas had been

warded off and suppressed, the Eastern Roman Empire stiffened into a rigidity out of which it never stirred. And Islam, the illegitimate child of Byzantium, soon followed the same course.

The "second generations" of both the original Chinese and Indian civilizations experienced a similar premature ossification. True, as the centers of these civilizations moved steadily southward they moved into barbarian territory; but at the same time they moved away from the more vigorous barbarian pressure on their northern confines. Meeting relatively little barbarian resistance in their southward migration, both "affiliated" civilizations soon fell into a stagnation like the Byzantine. On the other hand, where there were large-scale, vigorous barbarian invasions, like that of Greece by the Dorian tribes, or where the center of a culture was transplanted to the homeland of the invading barbarians, as happened with both the ancient Hebrew and the modern Western societies, the ultimate result was a civilization more creative than most others.

Barbarian peoples, whose primitive cultures are almost always in process of disintegration by the time they appear within the ken of history, cannot but be deeply affected by the higher civilizations with which they come in contact. And history shows that the permanence of barbarism is not the real threat to civilization—barbarism being almost everywhere a passing phase—but the paralysis and stagnation of civilization itself. Such stagnation is not effectively dispelled where the heirs of an old and high civilization can achieve quick and overwhelming cultural ascendancy over barbarian neighbors and "converts"; when that happens, the old, exhausted forms of faith and life are able to reassert themselves before experiencing an access of vitality from the younger peoples on which they are imposed. It would seem that the emergence of a strong new civilization in the "second generation" or later depends on the intrusion of energetic barbarian peoples, secure in their own homelands, who in the course of many centuries imbibe the spirit and transform

the ways of the older civilization or civilizations to which their culture affiliates.

If it can be said that the Western is probably the most vigorous of all civilizations since the river valley ones of the "first generation" in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China, this is certainly due to the great part played in its development by barbarian peoples who stayed put in their homelands in Northwestern Europe. Western Christianity could not have become the powerful, vital religion it did without drinking at that source. (To avoid common misunderstandings, let me say that when I speak of "Northern barbarians" I have in mind such figures as Charlemagne and William the Conqueror, not agitators from the slums of modern big cities, like Hitler—who exploited a new-fangled and entirely mythical barbarian "past" to justify his gangsterism.)

THE part played by barbarians in the affiliating of new civilizations with old ones is as repetitive a phenomenon as the culture cycle itself. One can sum it up by saying that "affiliations are the more successful the greater the extent to which they take place in a barbarian milieu." Toynbee's rejection of this view has involved him from the start in a number of astonishingly oblique interpretations. The oddest was his attempt to extract Sparta (and with it, by implication, the Doric core of the Hellenic world) from the context of Hellenic civilization and treat it as a separate, "arrested civilization"; yet Sparta was obviously a residual survival of the earliest, most decisive age of Hellas, and retained the vitality to play a crucial role throughout its climactic phase.

Toynbee hardly does much better when he treats the early medieval civilizations of Ireland and Scandinavia as "abortive" but independent cultural units. Admittedly, the different historical elements that go to make up any civilization are at first more or less independent of one another. The ultimate relation of these elements to the new culture arising from their fusion must depend in the first place on their individual share in creating it. Now it seems plain that much of

what makes up Western as opposed to Eastern Christianity is of Irish origin; nothing but a stubborn blindness to the importance of barbarian influences in the emergence of new civilizations could have led to neglect of this essential fact. As for Scandinavia, it is not the Old Norse literature and religion, so beloved of the Nazis, that form its essential contribution to emergent Western civilization; these features of Old Norse culture must be considered rather as survivals of a pre-Western Germanic stage of development that was preserved in Scandinavia longer than in Germany and was able to reach fuller maturity there because of Scandinavia's greater distance from the Christianized parts of Europe. What was crucial to Scandinavia's relations with the rest of Western Europe was the unmatched role the Vikings played in the creation of the modern Western state: first through the centralized government of Normandy, then through the establishment of the Kingdom of Scotland and the conquest of England, and finally through the conquest of Sicily, where a momentous merger of Eastern and Northern systems of government took place. To shut the Vikings out of the political history of Europe is tantamount to eliminating its intelligible frame of reference. Needless to say, once Western civilization had broken out of the chrysalis state, it reacted upon the Irish and Scandinavian elements that had helped bring it to life, and eventually drew them into its own orbit.

THESSE examples raise the more general problem of the role of geographical areas in the emergence and later history of a high civilization. Though a full discussion of this would exceed the limits of the present article, it can be stated as a general law that areas destined to become altogether marginal in the later stages of a civilization usually play a dominant part during its creative phase—the period when it does not yet possess a cultural center of gravity. Thus such border regions as Thessaly and Crete were of focal importance to prehistorical Hellas.

Geographically, the genesis of a civiliza-

tion usually consists in the invasion of forces from outside that finally converge and become concentrated in one or more centrally located areas. These areas, generally, start out as border regions, lying between the domains of an older civilization and those inhabited by the barbarian peoples who now infuse the new civilization with their vital energy. Thus all three cradle areas of Western civilization—Normandy, Lorraine, and Burgundy—were places where Latinized influences met and cross-bred with Germanic ethnic and cultural elements. The same cross-breeding defines the relation between the Indus and the Ganges valley cultures in the "second" Indian civilization; between lowlands and plateau cultures in both the pre-Columbian civilizations; between North and South in Mesopotamian civilization; and so on.

If adequate weight is given to this recurrent fact, a clear pattern for the culture cycle begins to define itself. During the prenatal phase of a "second generation," or affiliated, civilization, two important but separate areas are involved, one the homeland of the anterior, parent civilization, the other the homeland of the barbarians who threaten it. When the civilization is finally born, a new cultural center usually materializes in the borderland between the two, and the further history of the civilization tends to be marked by an alternation of cultural and political dominance between the two areas.

Thus the constant struggle for preponderance between North and South is an obtrusive feature of the history of the West. In the beginning the regions fairly close to the northern limits of our civilization predominated; gradually the center of gravity moved southwards until it came to rest, in the 15th and 16th centuries, in Southern Europe. The original trend in the West, therefore, would appear to have been away from the homeland of the former barbarians to that of the old, parent civilization. Then, however, a fierce reaction set in—the Reformation, which led to a large-scale breaking away of the old barbarian countries from their cultural servitude to the South. Once

this partial cultural scission had been achieved, the old barbarian domains reasserted their political leadership and the center of political power again moved northward—to turn westward across the Atlantic in our day.

The swing back toward the old barbarian lands has usually coincided with a great crisis such as seems to have marked the middle of every culture cycle, and in which the shifting of the center is as a rule compelled by a religious upheaval—e.g., the Reformation or Islam. In such an upheaval, the different cultural and spiritual inclinations of the recently civilized barbarians reassert themselves against the traditions of the older cultures to which the barbarians had submitted during the early development of the particular civilization. In the Islamic "movement," a genuinely Oriental attitude took the field against the half-Hellenized Orientalism of Byzantium; during the Reformation, a Germanic belief in destiny, clothed in the doctrine of predestination, asserted itself against Roman Catholic Hellenism.

These geographical shifts are, of course, tied up with the rise and decline of a civilization, but even more intimately and decisively with the profound, pivotal crisis that seems to overtake every civilization around the middle of its life-span—a crisis arising precisely from the fact that a "second generation" civilization tends to be a symbiosis of two vastly different elements. In connection with this point, the story of the Renaissance and the Reformation in the West throws much light on the history of Byzantium and Islam. Though these last constitute the field most congenial to Toynbee and the one wherein he lays claim to being an expert in his own right, it is the field in which he fails most signally. Whatever else one may say about his relation to Spengler, his *débâcle* here must be laid to his neglect of the findings of his predecessor.

WITH some justification, Toynbee advances the idea of a "Syriac" civilization that arose between Sinai and the upper Tigris in the second half of the 2nd mil-

lennium B.C.E., finding its main political expression in Assyria and its "universal state" in the Persian Empire of the Achae-menians. One might conclude that Alexander's conquests and the ensuing Hellenization of the Middle East marked the death of this civilization and the emergence of a new affiliated civilization from the fusion of the East and Hellas. But this would introduce the notion of a double parentage, which we have seen that Toynbee implicitly repudiates. He prefers a different conclusion: that, with Alexander, the Syriac civilization, far from dying, went into a deep slumber that lasted for a thousand years and reawakened when the 'Abassid Caliphs defeated the Omayyads and moved the capital of the Caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad in 750 C.E. The Syriac civilization's new lease on life lasted until 1922, when the rump of the Ottoman Empire was secularized—and not even this late date marks its conclusive end.

Why, however, should the Syriac provide the only known example of a civilization's capacity to hibernate? If this is hibernation, then one can discover similar cases elsewhere: how the Indus civilization slept until it re-emerged as the "Indic" or classical Indian civilization, only to doze off again and re-emerge a second time as the Hindu civilization; how Hellenism slept until it awoke transformed into Western Christianity; how Mayan culture fell into a slumber before reawakening as the Toltec-Aztec culture; and so on and so on. In other words, the Syriac civilization offers a typical example of the process Toynbee describes as "affiliation," but for the sake of a romantic whim, he makes it an exceptional case.

Yet Spengler, too, sensed something untypical in the history of the Middle East. In his view, the Middle Eastern civilization that he calls "Arabic," and Toynbee "Syriac," never fell asleep, but for centuries wore the mask of Hellenism. To cover this situation, Spengler devised the term "pseudomorphosis." This was meant to express the fact that the overwhelming formal strength of Hellenic tradition, which survived the

death of Hellenic civilization itself, prevented the Arabic world from realizing itself naturally and natively; instead, it was compelled to cast its utterly un-Hellenic thoughts and feelings in Hellenic molds. This, according to Spengler, explains the fierce reaction when at long last the Arabic world found its own indigenous expression in the form of Islam.

The concurrence of two minds as different as those of Spengler and Toynbee in finding an exceptional character in Middle Eastern history suggests the existence of truly exceptional objective circumstances in Arabic-Syriac society. These circumstances—they are not really unique but only rather infrequent—are revealed by a comparison of the Middle Eastern culture cycle with that of Western civilization. Normandy, Lorraine, Burgundy, and Saxony—only a short time out of barbarism or else newly barbarized—were the dominant areas of the West in the earliest phase of its culture cycle. By contrast, the Middle East, in the earlier phases of its culture cycle, was dominated not by such half-barbarian areas as Iraq, let alone Arabia proper, but by Antioch, Alexandria, and Byzantium—its most Hellenized centers. But the preponderance of the barbaric element in the early evolution of Western civilization, and the contrasting preponderance of Hellenism in the early stages of Middle Eastern civilization, confront us with a relative, not an absolute, difference.

What is present in both situations is the merging of two old civilizations in a barbarian setting. If in the Middle East the old culture area predominated, and in the West the old barbarian one, the reason for the difference is not far to seek. The barbarian setting in which the Middle Eastern civilization arose was the same disadvantageous one that Byzantium, the civilization of Eastern Christianity, had to cope with; and when, with Mohammed, its original Arabic elements erupted to the surface of Middle Eastern civilization and took control of it, it was at a late stage in its development. Spengler's term "pseudomorphosis" is not adequate for the analysis of this his-

torical process, and Toynbee's theory of "hibernation" is even less so.

But Spengler, unaware of Toynbee's "sleeping beauty" theory, at least kept a firm grasp on the essential unity of the whole historical phase that began with the Roman Empire and ended in a new barbarization following the fall of the 'Abassid Caliphate in the 12th century. Lacking Toynbee's compulsion to insist on the notion of a final "universal church," Spengler—to my mind, correctly—identified Islam as, at bottom, a Christian heresy.

We did not know in Spengler's time, as we do today, that Mohammed gleaned his basic ideas neither from Orthodox Christianity nor Orthodox Judaism, but from the Ebionites, a residual Judeo-Christian sect. Nonetheless, in the Christian heresy of Monophysitism there lay a clear connecting link between Orthodox Christianity and Islam; with this evidence in hand, Spengler was able to discern in the rise of Islam a fairly exact parallel with the rise of Protestantism in the Western world. And he also saw a similar analogy between the rise of Assyria in the 9th century B.C.E. and the pivotal change in Hellenic civilization at the end of the 6th century B.C.E.—a parallel he also drew with pivotal moments halfway in the evolution of other civilizations.

And if the geographical plan of the Arabic civilization was untypical in the beginning, it was not so later on—the emergence of Islam in its second phase made it conform to the standard pattern by shifting the cultural center to an area that had previously been the homeland of barbarians. Yet insofar as the post-Alexandrian civilization of the Middle East attained its "natural" geographical plan only with the triumph of Islam, its previous geographical structure must be considered an aberration, and Spengler's coinage of the term "pseudomorphosis" to describe it has some justification.

IN THE final stages of their respective interpretations of Middle Eastern civilization, Spengler and Toynbee again converge, only quickly to separate once more, and in the

most dramatic way. Spengler, owing perhaps to his systematic effort to isolate and define the individual identity of each civilization, was generally ahead of Toynbee in analyzing the political structures of civilizations in their own terms. Such obvious features as the role of the *polis* in Hellas and of the nation-state in the West assumed for him the status of major symbols setting off the respective civilization from all others. Within this context, Spengler discovered that, for the post-Alexandrian civilization of the Middle East, the religious community, usually in the form of a church, played the political role assigned to the *polis* in Hellas and to the nation-state in the West. Here he concurred in the main with Toynbee, who (as we pointed out in our previous article of May 1955) insisted on the basic importance of the *millet* system of communal organization in the Near and Middle East.

Yet once again at this juncture Toynbee, having barely announced his own formulation, proceeds to disregard it. If the *millet* is the counterpart of the "parochial" political units of other civilizations—and what else can it be?—it should follow that the sum total of the *millets* of the Middle East formed the body and political substance of the post-Alexandrian civilization of the region. This view was consistently adhered to by Spengler, who regarded Orthodox Christianity, Monophysitism, Nestorianism, Talmudic Jewry, Sunnitic and Shi'itic Islam, etc., etc., as the "nations" of the post-Alexandrian culture area and culture cycle. (This idea, incidentally, seems to me to be Spengler's most relevant contribution to the study of history, far surpassing in value the more general notions of his system.)

Toynbee, on the other hand, in one of those illogical reversals which characterize his whole work, suddenly, after having asserted that the *millet* system defined the political order of Syriac civilization, turns around and proceeds to treat each *millet* community as a separate civilization. Thus we are presented with Orthodox Christian, Nestorian, Monophysite, Judaic, Sunnite,

and Shi'ite *civilizations* (why Toynbee does not extend the classification to the Druzes, Maronites, and numberless other sects scattered through Syria and the Lebanon, I do not know). Spengler's signal insight into the fact that this whole welter of religious communities expressed various aspects of one and the same cultural current, is discarded by Toynbee, who thus creates the greatest confusion in the field where he is supposed to be most expert. . . .

IN SUM, however, the basic objection to Toynbee's treatment of the culture cycle—his main subject—is that he does not sufficiently investigate the factors which, taken together, constitute its actual dynamics. The formula of "challenge and response," however unobjectionable in itself, is far too abstract and general to cover even the most elementary problems of cultural development. Fundamentally a biological notion, it cannot furnish the key to any of the special problems of the subject in hand. Rather, it permits Toynbee to evade them all by easy references to "free will."

My own observations in this article do not pretend to any finality. I shall be satisfied if they have given the reader some sense of the vastness of the problems implicit in any study of the culture cycle and of the general forms under which civilizations arise and develop. And I shall be satisfied if my remarks have conveyed a notion of the great gaps that remain in both Spengler's and Toynbee's elucidation of even the more elementary aspects of the subject.

When Spengler broached the problem of the culture cycle toward the end of the First World War, he caught the general public's attention in Germany and elsewhere, but the dire emergencies brought on by the depression and the rise of Nazism and Communism pushed such questions into the background. In this interlude of relative calm, it is well that we return to them. The answers they require are more crucial even than those that we must devise for the most pressing problems of the moment.